

Colonization and the Revolutionary War Background to the Colonies

Before the Revolutionary War, there were thirteen **colonies**¹ under British rule in North America. People came from all over Europe seeking freedom or fortune in the colonies. Many people brought their culture with them, and people of similar backgrounds often came together or settled in the same place. Soon, each colony began to take on its own character.

There were three main groups of colonies: The New England Colonies, the Middle Colonies, and the Southern Colonies. Each group began to share characteristics based on its location and people. For example, the Southern Colonies had fertile soil and sunshine necessary for farms. The Northern Colonies had some important **ports**².

New England

Soil in New England was rocky and the winters were harsh, which made farming difficult. There were small farms in New England, but no big farms like the southern plantations. Instead, the North became the center of the shipbuilding industry. Trees were everywhere. Before long, Boston, which began as the Massachusetts Bay Colony, became the most important port city in the colonies.

Religion was very important to the people in New England. You may have heard of the **Pilgrims**³ who came to the New World to find religious freedom. They wanted to be free to practice their own religion, but they did not always allow other people the same freedom. Town life was centered on the church. If you did not belong to the church, you were an outcast.

¹ **colonies** – territories distant from the country that governs them

² **ports** – places where ships and boats can load and unload

³ **Pilgrims** – the people who left England because of religious persecution and came to America to found the Plymouth Colony

The Middle Colonies

The Middle Colonies **tolerated**¹ more types of religions than the Pilgrims and **Puritans**² of New England. William Penn founded the colony Pennsylvania. He wanted people of every faith and every nationality to come to his colony. Philadelphia, “The City on the Hill,” was the biggest city in all the colonies. When the Revolutionary War broke out, representatives from all the colonies met in Philadelphia for the First Continental Congress. Philadelphia became the first capital of the new continental government. Many of our nation’s symbols, like the Liberty Bell, are still in Philadelphia.

New York was also a Middle Colony and an important shipping and trading center. The population in New York was the most diverse of anywhere in the young colonies. If you listened in on dinner table conversations along the Hudson River, you would hear more than 12 languages! Most of the immigrants from other countries who came to the middle colonies were skilled at a craft. They came and built shops where they could practice their trade — from cabinet making to weaving to candle making.

The Southern Colonies

Rich land and a mild climate determined the future of the Southern Colonies: agriculture. The Southern Colonies were based on farming, especially tobacco farming. Tobacco was grown on large plantations. The most important people in the Southern Colonies lived on these big farms and not in towns. As a result, the Southern Colonies were more spread out. Towns were smaller. Houses were more spread out from each other. Instead of going to schools in town like children in New England, southern children might have studied at home. Many were also sent to England to be educated.

¹ **tolerated** – allowed, permitted

² **Puritans** – people who wanted simpler forms of worship than others did in the 1500s and 1600s

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. Why did people come from Europe to the 13 colonies?
 - a. They wanted to live near relatives.
 - b. They wanted to go for a vacation.
 - c. They wanted religious freedom and a better way of life.
 - d. They wanted to see if the trees were better for shipbuilding than back home.

2. The Southern Colonies had rich land and a mild climate, and the effect of this was that
 - a. British colonists did not want to live there.
 - b. those colonies focused on agriculture.
 - c. the people who lived there needed food.
 - d. those colonies chose to build factories.

3. Based on the passage, it can be concluded that
 - a. every colony tried to focus mostly on shipping.
 - b. each colony's location affected its businesses.
 - c. life at home for the colonists was the same in each colony.
 - d. the colonies did not need to trade with each other.

4. Read the following sentences: "Town life was centered on the church. If you did not belong to the church, you were an outcast."

The word **outcast** means

 - a. someone forced to work outside
 - b. someone kicked out of a social group
 - c. someone praised as a hero
 - d. someone who is not remembered

5. The passage “Background to the Colonies” is mostly about

- a. the three groups of colonies and how they were different
- b. the ground that was shared by all of the colonies
- c. the biggest city in each colony and why it was so big
- d. the differences in weather between the colonies

6. What was the biggest city among the colonies, and what colony was it in?

7. Based on the passage, explain how the New England Colonies would have been different if they did not have many trees.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

New York didn't have a lot of farms; _____ it was a shipping and trading center.

- a. instead
- b. first
- c. soon
- d. for example

9. Read the following sentence.

In the 1700s, colonists lived in small towns and on big farms in the Southern Colonies.

Answer the questions below based on the information provided in the sentence you just read. One of the questions has already been answered for you.

1. Who? _____

2. What did colonists do? _____

3. When? in the 1700s

4. Where? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** tolerate: to allow or permit.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____

Teacher Guide and Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 830

Passage Text Structure: Descriptive – the writer explains, defines or illustrates a concept or topic

Passage Summary: Before the Revolutionary War there were 13 colonies under British rule in North America. Each colony had its own character, and colonies were part of three distinct groups: New England, Middle, and Southern Colonies.

1. Why did people come from Europe to the 13 colonies?
 - a. They wanted to live near relatives.
 - b. They wanted to go for a vacation.
 - c. They wanted religious freedom and a better way of life.**
 - d. They wanted to see if the trees were better for shipbuilding than back home.

2. The Southern Colonies had rich land and a mild climate, and the effect of this was that
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- the three groups of colonies and how they were different**
 - the ground that was shared by all of the colonies
 - the biggest city in each colony and why it was so big
 - the differences in weather between the colonies
6. What was the biggest city among the colonies, and what colony was it in?

Suggested answer: The biggest city in all the colonies was Philadelphia. Philadelphia was in the colony Pennsylvania in the Middle Colonies.
[paragraph 5]

7. Based on the passage, explain how the New England Colonies would have been different if they did not have many trees.

Suggested answer: If New England did not have many trees, they would not have been the center of the shipbuilding industry. They would have needed to focus on other industries.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

New York didn't have a lot of farms; _____ it was a shipping and trading center.

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- first
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In the 1700s, colonists lived in small towns and on big farms in the Southern Colonies.

Answer the questions below based on the information provided in the sentence you just read. One of the questions has already been answered for you.

- Who? **colonists**
- What did colonists do? **lived in small towns and on big farms**

3. When? in the 1700s
4. Where? **in the Southern Colonies**

10. **Vocabulary Word:** tolerate: to allow or permit.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.